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Senate

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The Senate met at 10 a.m., on the expiration of the recess, and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Eternal God, robed with honor and majesty, we praise You for the marvelous things You have done throughout our Nation's history. Lord, thoughts about Your mighty deeds continue to fill us with joy. You are Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending.

Lord, in these tumultuous times, we continue to trust You to compel evil forces to retreat. Surround this Nation with the shield of Your divine favor as You execute judgment from Your throne. Lord, continue to remind our lawmakers of their accountability to You.

And Lord, bless Ukraine.

We pray in the Name of our Savior. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUJÁN). The Senator from Vermont.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, it is hard really to know where to start. I am

here on the Senate floor to talk about guns. In a world in chaos, we cannot forget about the chaos right here at home. Gun violence is killing our children: 19 students and two of their teachers in Uvalde 2 weeks ago; 20 children, and 7 others, in Newtown, CT—nearly 10 years ago; 12 students and a teacher at Columbine—23 years ago. In between? Las Vegas, 58 dead; the Pulse nightclub, 49 dead; Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, 17 dead—all victims of gun violence. And this is just a snapshot of the epidemic of gun violence in our country.

I look back at my 48 years here in the Senate and say, When will we say enough? We hadn't yet finished honoring and celebrating the lives of the 10 victims in Buffalo before news broke of the tragedy unfolding in Uvalde—19 children, 2 teachers, massacred in their school, where they learn and work, where they should be safe—safe to just be children.

This weekend, at least a dozen people were killed and 60 more injured in shooting incidents across the country. When is it enough?

After Sandy Hook, well over decade after Columbine shook the Nation, the conscience of the country was stirred. Now, we said, now we must look at our gun laws. Now, we must think about what simply makes sense and what does not. The Judiciary Committee acted. I was proud to lead that, but the Senate did not. There were bipartisan proposals—proposals that I believe can muster bipartisan support again today, support that acknowledges that there is a problem and acknowledges that we can and must do something about it. The problem is not the Second Amendment. The problem is the view that the Second Amendment is itself absolute.

I was in Vermont last week, and people would say to me, Of course, we pray for the victims, but we also pray that Congress will finally stand up and do something.

I am with my fellow Vermonters. I am a lifelong gun owner. I was on the target shooting team at St. Michael's College in Vermont, my alma mater—earned my letter in that. Millions of other Americans like myself, lifelong gun owners, are responsible gun owners and honor Americans' rights to own firearms and choose to own firearms to defend their families, or to hunt—but not to commit battlefield-style murders. To most Americans, firearms are valued for defensive purposes and not for murder and mayhem.

There are ways that we can use our common sense to keep our communities safe and keep guns out of the hands of people who are dangerous. Let's start with background checks. They are a quick and easy way to help accomplish that goal. There is bipartisan support to require background checks for commercial firearms sales. Now, I think we should go further, but we have to start somewhere, and commercial sales background checks are a good start; background checks would help to bring common sense back into this discussion.

How about extreme risk laws, also called "red flag" laws? We should encourage more States to enact these laws to allow loved ones or law enforcement agencies to petition a court for an order that would temporarily prevent an individual in crisis from accessing firearms. People who are in crisis and are a danger to themselves or others should not have ready access to firearms. This, again, is practical common sense.

We have seen where criminal gangs will send people into other States to make straw purchases of weapons that are then sold back to them. There is no criminal statute specifically prohibiting straw purchasing, so prosecutors have to rely on laws that prohibit making false statements in connection with the purchase of a firearm—a paperwork

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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offense. There is bipartisan agreement that we should strengthen the penalties for straw purchasers to deter this dangerous conduct. This, again, is practical common sense.

We should also add common sense and consistency to minimum age requirements to purchase guns. You have to be 21 to buy a handgun. You also have to be 21 to purchase alcohol or even cigarettes. But under our Federal laws? Just 18 to buy a shotgun or rifle, including an automatic rifle like those used on battlefields, like the ones used in Buffalo and Uvalde. And if we cannot find enough common ground to ban military-style assault rifles, we should at least raise the age at which they can be purchased from 18 to 21.

All of these proposals are practical common sense; they should be the least that Congress can do to help prevent the next mass shooting. But we have a problem. We have a problem in the United States when the leading cause of childhood death in 2020 was firearms. Think of that. Our children and our grandchildren—and the leading cause of death is firearms.

We have a problem when we cannot stand up—and together—to respond to the fears of our children. We have a problem when we cannot push aside the interests of the NRA and the gun industry or of the Gun Owners of America or other pressure groups that tell us that Democrats are “coming for your guns.” Of course, some of the gun industry will say that because it boosts their sales. It boosts their sales, and children die.

I am a Democrat. I am a gun owner. I have been both, nearly my entire life. I have also been a prosecutor and prosecuted cases and went to death scenes at 3 in the morning and seeing people shot. I am also parent and a grandparent. I am a U.S. Senator. I am the Dean of the Senate, and I am a proud Vermonter. In my home State, we have a long tradition, dating back to our founding, of hunting the land. Ownership of our firearms is part of that. I have also heard from more than 1,000 Vermonters since Uvalde, urgently telling me that something must be done.

When is it enough? Everywhere Marcelle and I went last week in Vermont, we heard, When is enough enough?

I have spent months—or actually years—listening to my friends on the Republican side in Congress talk about protecting children. Who will step up now and who will step in to say enough? If we are to protect our children, we must be the adults with the courage to listen to their fears and to act to alleviate them. We are the adults who must protect our children. We must protect our children. If we do nothing, we are not protecting them.

This isn't about politics. This isn't about the moneyed interests of pressure groups, lobbying Congress without acknowledging the tragedies in our world today. This isn't even about you

or me, Mr. President. This is about the thousands of people who are killed through gun violence every year and the countless family members forced to sorrowfully move on in their absence, saying, Why our family? Why our loved one? Why my parents? Why my children? Why my brother? Or why my sister? Why? In this, the greatest country on earth, our horrific record of gun violence.

In no way is this about revoking the Second Amendment, but about applying practical common sense safeguards to help mitigate the violence.

Yet again, I ask, as I have since I have been in the Senate, and the American people ask: When is it enough? When is it enough? I join those who pray for the victims, but I especially join those who pray that Congress will have the courage, Democrats and Republicans alike, to finally do something meaningful.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, today, the House oversight and reform committee heard from a witness who, by all means, should never ever have had to come before the Congress, Miah Cerrillo, an 11-year-old girl who survived the shooting in Uvalde, TX.

Our House colleagues will also hear from Felix and Kimberly Rubio, the parents of 10-year-old Lexi, who was killed in the shooting. You can just imagine their broken hearts.

They will also hear from the only pediatrician in Uvalde available to treat the victims on that awful, awful, awful day.

I hope every single Member of the House and Senate pays attention to these proceedings. God knows, many in Congress need to listen to what these witnesses have to say.

We need to listen, and Congress needs to act, because across every neighborhood, every school, every city, every town—urban, suburban, rural—Americans are wondering the same thing: When is Congress going to act to stop the violence?

Now, that is precisely what we are working on right now in the Senate. It will be hard to believe, after hearing what these witnesses have to say, that the Senate cannot find a way to come together and act on gun violence.

Over the past week and a half, my Democratic colleagues, led by the efforts of Senators MURPHY, SINEMA, BLUMENTHAL, MANCHIN, COONS, HEINRICH, and others, have been holding good faith talks with Republicans to see if we can arrive at an agreement on gun violence legislation.

As I have said, these bipartisan talks deserve the space they need to produce meaningful results, and so I hope my colleagues continue to make progress toward an effective agreement—hopefully, by the end of the week.

The overwhelming consensus of our caucus, among the gun safety violence prevention advocates and among the American people, is that even if we can't get everything done, that getting something real done is worth pursuing.

Let me repeat that. It is an overwhelming consensus in this caucus, among the broad panoply of gun groups, gun safety groups, and among the American people: Get something done. Get something real done, even if it is not everything that many of us would wish for.

Given the other side's long-held refusal to do anything meaningful on gun violence, we know how difficult this is. But that is all the more reason for us to explore every realistic opportunity to getting something real done.

We know we won't get everything we want. The debate for gun safety will continue after this moment, but we have a moral obligation right now to try and get something meaningful—something meaningful—done for the American people in the name of those who have died.

This is not a partisan issue. Gun safety is overwhelmingly backed by a large majority of Americans, a majority of Democrats, Republicans, Independents. It is bipartisan because all Americans know the same thing: We stand alone in the developed world in the number of mass shootings that take place every year. We stand alone among the developed nations in the world in that on any given day, another school, another grocery store, another hospital, another concert, another neighborhood can suddenly become a site of unimaginable tragedy.

Americans, many for the first time, are thinking: I am going to be shot, whether they are in a supermarket, their kids are in a school, or anywhere else.

And we stand alone in that year after year, the plague of mass shootings in this country has been met by inaction. When other countries have faced these mass shootings, they have acted, and they have acted well.

Why aren't we?

The American people are tired and angry of the same thing happening again and again. They are tired of nothing getting done. They are tired of the greatest country in the world being paralyzed and not acting in a right way, mainly because people on the other side of the aisle haven't joined us.